DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 860 PS 024 643

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TITLE	How Can We Help Make Schools Safe for Children?
INSTITUTION	ACCESS ERIC, Rockville, MD.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	ERIC-96-5022
PUB DATE	96
CONTRACT	RR92024001
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Aggression; Behavior Problems; Educational Environment; Elementary Schools; Elementary Secondary Education; High Schools; Parent Participation; Parent Student Relationship; Peer Relationship; Prevention; Safety; Safety Education; *School Safety; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Child Safety

ABSTRACT

The primary cause of anxiety for many parents today is protecting their children from acts of violence at school. This brochure discusses what steps parents and school administrators can take to make schools safer. First, the brochure discusses what is being done to ensure children's safety in school, such as teaching prevention skills, providing alternatives to gangs, improving school design, and monitoring visitors carefully. The brochure also explains how parents can help their children practice safe behavior: not talking to strangers, observing the safety-in-numbers rule, and choosing friends carefully. Next, the brochure provides suggestions for how parents can help ensure safety in their children's schools, including visiting frequently, becoming members of the school's parent teacher organization, and being acquainted with their children's friends and their families. Finally, the brochure lists organizations parents can contact for additional information. A list of sources related to the brochure is included. (HTH)

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How Can We Help Make Schools Safe for Children?

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The primary cause of anxiety for many parents today is protecting their children from acts of violence at school. In general, parents and school officials are concerned about preventing children from becoming either aggressors or victims. This brochure discusses what steps parents and school administrators can take to make schools safer.

What Is Being Done To Ensure My Child's Safety in School?

Despite the extraordinary media coverage of and public concern over violence in our schools, students are safer there than in any other place except their homes. Still, school officials recognize the potential threats to the safety of children attending school and school-related activities. Many are seeking ways to help school personnel control the school environment more effectively and to be more visible and available to students who need better guidance. In some districts, for example, drivers of school vehicles must complete rigorous training in managing student behavior as well as operating their vehicles safely. In addition, more school districts are requiring routine drug screening for vehicle operators and are training school personnel in crisis management and violence intervention. Other violence-reduction strategies include:

★ **Teaching prevention skills.** Students are being taught mediation skills (problem solving and communication) and ways to handle their emotions—especially anger—without hurting others. These skills will help them avoid potentially dangerous situations. Students are also being taught "safe" behaviors such as doing activities in groups, alerting school personnel if a stranger is on school grounds, and reporting situations that threaten other students' safety.

★ **Providing alternatives to gangs.** School districts and communities are working together to offer students alternatives to gang membership, including activities that build self-esteem and help students deal with feelings of powerlessness. Strategies include providing special assistance to students who are at risk of gang membership, creating an atmosphere that fosters a sense of belonging in all students, informing parents and school staff about gangs and teaching students how to avoid being drawn into them, and giving students regular opportunities to discuss school experiences and to plan for future successes and rewards.

★ **Improving school designs.** As school buildings are constructed and old ones are renovated, safety has become an essential element of their design. In new schools, office areas are now centrally located for easy accessibility from other locations in the building or campus. Hallways have convenient exits and are well lit. Deadend hallways and staircase hideaways have been eliminated, and restrooms are located closer to administrators to prevent students from hanging out.

★ **Monitoring visitors carefully.** Schools are becoming more assertive in screening visi-

tors, requiring them to register when entering the building or campus and by employing security personnel. Schools can be both secure and friendly by requesting visitors to check in rather than report to the office. Registered visitors are given a pass or badge to display prominently to let staff and students know that they have been acknowledged by the administration. Staff and students are instructed to report people without proper identification to a school administrator. In addition, many schools now ask that parents give the names of adults who are allowed to pick up a child, and require those individuals to show identification to school personnel when signing a student out.

How Can I Help My Child Practice Safe Behavior?

Parents can teach their children safe behaviors before enrolling them in school. Children who know the appropriate action to take in a given situation are less likely to expose themselves to danger. Safe behaviors to teach your child are:

- **Not talking to strangers.** This warning is more important today than ever before. Encourage your children to get to know school staff other than their teachers and get acquainted with them yourself. Familiarity helps children recognize adults who don't belong as well as adults who can offer help when needed. As a plus, children will also learn that the school staff are their friends and more than just rule enforcers.
- **Taking safety in numbers.** Encourage your children to stay close to friends and to walk in groups in school hallways. Suggest that they limit their restroom visits to recess and breaks and use facilities located in high-traffic areas or in areas more likely to be visited by staff.
- **Choosing friends carefully.** Encourage your children to avoid students who do not handle anger effectively. Ask your children to be particularly careful with classmates who bring weapons to school and to report any such incidents to their teachers.

How Can I Help Ensure Safety In My Child's School?

As a parent, make it your responsibility to become as active in your child's school as your schedule permits. Here are some strategies you can use:

- Visit frequently, being sure to register with administrative personnel when you arrive. Volunteer to help in your child's classroom or elsewhere in the school as often as you can and encourage other parents to visit and volunteer. The more parents are involved and visible, the safer their children's schools will be.
- Become a member of the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or other parent–teacher organization. By attending meetings and participating in its committees

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and activities, you'll become acquainted with other parents and with school personnel.

* Get to know your child's friends and their families. Productive friendships and a sense of common purpose among students, teachers, and neighbors make schools and neighborhoods safer.

Where Can I Find More Information About School Safety?

In general, school personnel are excellent sources of information and suggestions. You can also contact your state and national PTA offices, local or state departments of education, or local public or school district libraries for publications outlining school safety practices, legislation, and helpful hints for creating a safer school environment. The following organizations can also assist you in locating more information:

Committee for Children
2203 Airport Way South, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98134–2027
800–634–4449

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Greensboro, NC 27412–5001
800–414–9769

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Institute for Urban and Minority Education
Teachers College, Columbia University
Main Hall, Room 303, Box 40
525 West 120 Street
New York, NY 10027–9998
800–601–4868

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
805–373–9977

Sources

Most of the following references—those identified with an ED or EJ number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Documents with an ED number can be found on microfiche at more than 900 locations or ordered in paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at 1–800–443–ERIC. Journal articles can be found at most research libraries. Call 1–800–LET–ERIC for more details.

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Written by Chester R. Robinson and James O. Fuller, ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. This publication was prepared by ACCESS ERIC with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RR92024001. The opinions expressed in this brochure do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. This brochure is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

ERIC 96-5022